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Reich + biodiversity + Petch

How to tell a big story in a small space – that was the challenge facing Reich + Petch Design International in designing the new Schad Gallery of Biodiversity at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Located in the historic part of the building on the second floor, what Reich + Petch had to work with is essentially a corridor linking galleries from the domed Rotunda to the west wing. At 10,000 square feet it is indeed a compact space in which to present more than 2,500 specimens. Says Anthony Reich, principal of Reich + Petch, “We decided to design a dynamic, totally immersive experience with three core themes that hope-

fully will make a lasting impact on visitors: life is amazingly diverse; life is intriguingly interconnected by invisible threads; and life is at risk – a growing reality.”

Key to the wide-open design are special oversized, double-glazed glass cases built in Germany to accommodate specimens, including live displays. Angular, slightly askew, not square, they are meant to evoke the ROM’s Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. Overhead cases, along with overhead models, help to reserve space; so do shelves displaying specimens in glass jars, atop a series of “discovery” drawers where visitors can closely examine the vast diversity of species.

Where most museums are



moving away from live material, the Schad Gallery includes the Coral Reef, a spectacular saltwater aquarium (a micro-environment on a 24-hour light cycle, it took six months to establish), and a leaf-cutter ant colony.

Each display contains photos and materials illustrating damage to the environment by man. Additional information is provided through 12 touch-screen terminals with 150 spe-

cially created videos on species that are endangered, extinct or at risk.

In addition to state-of-the-art technology, Reich + Petch made a special effort to use recycled and sustainable products. Plyboo, bamboo-based plywood that resembles exotic hardwood, covers the outside of the display cases. Along the main corridor, cases are lined with PaperStone, a stone look-alike made from recycled office paper. As well, energy-saving LED lighting is used throughout the gallery.

“The ROM’s extensive natural history collections and our curators’ on-going research in Life Sciences has always been a source of pride for the institution,” says William Thorsell, ROM director and CEO. “Now with the spectacular Schad Gallery, we can demonstrate our strengths and engage people of all ages in the urgent need to protect Earth’s species and ecosystems.”



Left More than 2,500 specimens are on display at the Royal Ontario Museum’s Schad Gallery of Biodiversity. Oversized, double-glazed glass cases – angular and slightly askew – are meant to evoke the ROM’s Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. **Above** At 10,000 square feet, the gallery is relatively compact. Overhead cases help to reserve space. **Below** The Coral Reef, a spectacular saltwater aquarium.





Over 25 years, we have evolved our viewpoint about design to create extraordinary moments and opportunities for people to have experiences that change their understanding and perspective of the world they live in.

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